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# THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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**RECENT PUBLICATIONS (Johnson)**

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## THE HARVARD REPORT—A CHALLENGE<sup>1</sup>

The request that I give some account of the Harvard Report on General Education in a Free Society was accompanied by the statement that some feel that it sounds the death knell of the Classics. With this point of view I am not in accord. While it leaves much unsaid that the teacher of language might wish that it had said, the Report specifically advocates the study of Latin or French—rather than General Language—as the best means of developing a keener sense of English vocabulary and structure, and it stresses these two languages particularly as 'the great repositories of the cultural heritage of the humanities.' In this it does injustice rather to Spanish and German, which it relegates chiefly to the role of merely tool subjects. Instead of sounding a knell of the Classics, it seems to me rather to challenge the teacher of Classics to make the most of a real opportunity.

In order to understand the real import of this work it is essential that one follow the admonition of President Conant in his Foreword that the book be read and considered as a unit. To read any one section without taking it in its relation to the whole produces a distorted and untrue picture. The specialist, regardless of his area of interest, must realize that this is not a report on special education except as such education is discussed in contrast to the main theme of general education, and that the purpose of the Report is to suggest how to plan a sufficient diversity in curriculum offerings to meet individual differences and yet to maintain some principle of unity between those offerings which will give a common background to all Americans—'to provide', as it so well expresses it, 'for the subjects that divide man from man and for those which unite them in their common humanity and citizenship.'

To those of us whose primary interest lies in the field of foreign language study the Report has things

to say which perhaps we need to ponder. In a general way we all know what compulsory education laws have done to the character and curriculum of the secondary school. But some of the figures cited are arresting. In the 70 years from 1870 to 1940, while the general population has tripled, high school enrollments were multiplied 90 times and those of the colleges 30 times. Three-fourths of the present secondary school population terminate their education at this point. Nearly one-half of the total population is concentrated in the 140 central cities, with their satellite towns and farming districts, which offer the greatest educational advantages paid for by the community. And the irony of the situation is that 'after the states of least wealth and the largest families have educated their children at their own expense, they then lose about half of these children to the urban and industrial states which do not reproduce themselves.' While the upper income group can afford to send all of its children to college, it produces only 8% of all the children. The middle-income group, with one-third of all the children, sends 60% of them through high school and 15% through college, while the lower-income group accounts for 60% of all the children but can send only 30% through high school and 5% through college.

Perhaps the most telling figure in the Report is that 20,000,000 of the voting population of the United States, according to NEA figures for 1940, had less than a sixth-grade education. From this we get the justification for the emphasis of this Report upon the need for universal general education. As is cogently set forth in the Report, it is as essential for the three-fourths who do not go on to college and for society that these make the best of themselves as it is that the one-fourth who are more privileged do so, both because it is their votes which determine the fate of the nation and because 'the good society consists of individuals who are independent in outlook and think for themselves while being willing to subordinate their indi-

vidual good to the common good.'

The Committee is so imbued with a sense of the need for achieving the 'right relationships between specialist training on the one hand, aiming at any one of a thousand different destinies, and education in a common heritage and toward a common citizenship on the other, that it stops in over forty spots in the Report to redefine what it means by general education. It cautions against confusing general with elementary education, nor should it consist of 'watered-down versions of more complex courses which are too fast for the slow and too slow for the fast.' Rather its courses should be specifically planned for the layman in the three accepted spheres of education, the humanities, the natural sciences with mathematics, and the social sciences, courses in which 'the great writings of our culture shall be simplified in such a way as to become a common possession.' The Committee states also that 'equal opportunity for all does not mean identical provisions for all', but 'access for all to those avenues of education which match their gifts and interests'.

In order to clarify the background against which we may consider what the Report has to say of foreign language study in general and of Latin (or Greek) in particular it is worthwhile to quote two or three of its statements with regard to the meaning of general education: (1) 'General education is used to indicate that part of a student's whole education which looks first of all to his life as a responsible human being and citizen; while the term *special education* indicates that part which looks to the student's competence in some occupation'. (2) 'A general education is distinguished from special education not by subject matter but in terms of method and outlook, no matter what the field'. (In this the Committee stresses the need for fresh courses in each major field specifically designed for the layman as contrasted with the usual elementary courses designed to lay the foundation for advanced study.) ... General education should... form a continuing core for all, taking up at least half of the student's time... The idea of commonness must show itself chiefly in a common requirement rather than in a common way of carrying it out. There must be courses of different difficulty and different method in each of the three spheres of general education'. And, very importantly, it says (3) 'General and special education are not and must not be placed in competition with each other... Special education can only realize its major purposes within a larger context, with which it can never afford to sever organic connections. General education is an organism, whole and integrated; special education is an organ, a member designed to fulfill a particular function within the whole... Special education instructs in what things can be done and how to do them; general education in what needs to be done

and to what ends... To some degree it should suffuse all special education'.

The Report recognizes the vital importance of language study in the field of special education and warns that any curriculum which fails to provide opportunities for such study is provincial and discriminatory. It is the role of language in general education which is the theme of the Report. We would all probably agree that studying Latin, as the repository of a great culture, 'for Latin's sake' is legitimate for the student beyond the elementary level. It is in the beginning courses, however, that we are challenged so to teach Latin as to make it contribute richly to the common education of which this Report treats.

Recognizing that there has been no more controversial topic than the role of language study in secondary education, the committee strongly endorses its possible values in contributing to the understanding of English and the mastery of English composition, characterizing such mastery as 'one of the most liberating, the most exciting and most sobering opportunities... that the humanities can offer.' At the same time it hits us in our most vulnerable spot with the statement that 'few bring their grasp of another language to a point where it has an explosive and a disciplinary effect on their English', and 'few lay hold through another language of cultural traditions surrounding and augmenting their own'. If some come from school systems which consciously aim at these results and are fairly well equipped with teachers able to bring them about, we must still remember the statistics given earlier and realize that great numbers of systems are not so equipped and that even where they are, not all teaching is such as to bring about these results. Certainly there is a challenge here to the systems which are adequately equipped that they accept a responsibility for training teachers able to achieve these results, in order that all communities may have equal opportunities for fruitful language learning. Not only are we challenged to teach as inspiringly and purposefully as is possible for us as individuals, but also to channel into the teaching profession those of our own students who show real linguistic talents and who have the kind of personality that makes for the successful teacher, in order that opportunities for really rewarding language learning may be far more wide-spread than at present. Assuredly unless both secondary school and college teachers of the Classics take the initiative in this matter and aggressively promote interest in teaching Latin as a desirable profession, there will be few replacements in this field as present teachers are retired or otherwise separated from their positions.

The problem is seen in how to provide a curriculum which shall help students to an improved ability to

handle language and at the same time to provide opportunity for the special training of the language major. The Report distinguishes between German and Spanish as 'tool' languages to be studied according to the intensive methods of special education and Latin and French to be studied for cultural ends, both the reasons for studying the 'tool' and the cultural languages being distinct and the methods equally so. This exclusion of German and Spanish from the company of Latin and French seems to me wholly indefensible. Certainly the reasons for and the methods of studying a language for a 'tool' objective will differ from those in studying it for a cultural objective. It is possible, however, to make one language yield either result, regardless of whether that language be Latin, French, German, or Spanish. It is even possible to have one course yield one result for those who desire it and the other for those who wish that.

While admitting that courses in General Language aim specifically at illuminating English, which the Committee insists is 'what any language should accomplish' at the elementary stage, it is critical of General Language as a 'talking down to students by merely offering them information without rousing in turn their own powers of performance as study of a single language can do'. Although it sees a possibility of well developed courses in General Language emerging as the core of English teaching in the ninth grade, it still accepts the study of a single language as the common way of giving perspective to English and proposes Latin or French as best suited to perform this function. It proposes that one or the other of these be begun in the seventh or eighth grade and holds that it is arguable that they should even be substituted for English at this point, since it considers that the advantages to school English would be enormous if more students came to it with some experience of syntax and some sense of the root meanings of words. It would seem far more logical to confine this function of language teaching to courses in Latin, which is pre-eminently fitted to give both the experience with syntax and the sense of the root meanings of words and which illuminates not only English but the other common European languages. Moreover, this objective is already accepted for Latin teaching at the elementary level and it can be attained while at the same time laying the foundation for specialized study of this Classic language without upsetting accepted practises and methods. To aim at this objective in the early stages of learning a modern language implies a method entirely at variance with the aural-oral approach, which is best practiced in those schools which are producing outstanding results in modern language teaching. The Committee's statement that 'the prime function of the early stages of language teaching is not to give a practical command

of the new language but to illustrate English' is highly debatable in the case of the modern languages. In the case of Latin, however, teaching it at the elementary stage with strong emphasis upon its relationship to English has proven in Washington, D. C., not only a source of profit and enjoyment to eighth-grade pupils, who continue to elect it in goodly numbers, but also an incentive to further study of the language in senior high school. The Committee makes a good point when it sees the advantage in studying a single language rather than General Language in the fact that 'it is something definite for students to grasp, an intellectually coherent system fixed in history and appealing both to their logical powers and to their imagination of mankind and of the past.'

I should like to suggest at this point a possible development from an experiment being currently conducted in Washington, where French is being taught to a second-grade and a fifth-grade class in one elementary school, although our regular language offerings ordinarily begin with the eighth grade. It should be possible to offer a modern language at that grade in the elementary school which experimentation indicates as the most favorable and to continue the study of that language for one or two periods a week through the successive grades. At the seventh or eighth grade, probably the latter, Latin could be introduced three or four times a week as the study best designed to awaken a sense of language structure and to illuminate all further language study by making pupils conscious of the root meanings of words that appear in English, in the Romanic languages, and even to some extent in German. After this elementary course many would continue the study of Latin as special education into and perhaps through the senior high school. Others would continue the more serious study of the modern language begun earlier. Some might begin a second modern language, and still others might discontinue language study, the choice in each case depending upon the individual's gifts, interests and aims, and the quality of guidance provided by the school. Certainly in this way Latin could make a great contribution to the aim of general education by raising the level of the language competence of most children.

In the realm of higher education the Committee's recommendations are made specifically for Harvard College, but they have interest for all interested in this field. Recognizing that the integrated human being at which education is aimed is the *good* man and that to produce the good man 'moral guidance is necessary to the end that native powers may be molded to ideal aims', it cautions against identifying the older western culture with traditionalism, since 'classical antiquity has handed down a working system of truth which relied upon both reason and experience and was de-



signed to provide a norm for civilized life'. It outlines the purpose of the humanities as the 'effort to understand man in relation to himself, that is to say, in his own inner aspirations and ideals', and it urges that general education provide for the reading of as little inferior material as possible. Literature courses are to give students the best literature of all times, so 'cleared of unnecessary and unrewarding obstacles' and made 'by abridgment and reflective editing (a task that must be done only by scholars) more accessible to general reading'. Also it points out that the majority of the works of great literature must be read by the majority of students in translation. There is always the chance, however, that such reading will spur some students to seek the means of reading the original; I am sure that we all know of concrete instances where this has been the case. And the Report goes on to say that 'general education will fail of part of its function unless it leads some to that vividness of understanding which only the original can inspire'. I believe that every lover of the Classics will applaud the Committee's statement which it gives as the chief reason for its proposed course in the 'Great Texts of Literature', and as the best argument for experimenting with it; namely, that 'too many students today have too little contact with thoughts that are beyond them (apart from the specialties) and that many are in fact passionately, if inarticulately, hungry for greatness in the common cares of men'.

For the high schools the Report recommends eight one-semester units (three in English, three in science and two in the social studies) specifically designed as courses in general education and scattered through the ninth to the twelfth grade. And in the case of those students for whom the high school is terminal there is to be one additional course in each of the three areas. This leaves the study of any foreign language in the area of electives, as has long been the case in the public schools of the District of Columbia. The proposition is in keeping with the Committee's thesis that American education can pursue simultaneously the two goals of general and special education and that the former must continually suffuse the whole school program, so that 'education may be the special forever flowing out of the general and forever returning to and enriching it'.

As a final word to the teacher of Latin in the secondary schools I would say: Such strides have been made in recent years in vitalizing the teaching of Latin at the elementary level and in making of it an open door to words and cultures for the boy and girl who may never go beyond that level, that the study of Latin is making a significant contribution to the aim of general education in raising the level of the average. The trouble is that we who know these facts just get together and tell each other about them. We should

be telling the world! To my mind the Harvard Report is a challenge that we maintain the vitality of this process, see to it that the whole educational and lay world knows what is being done to demonstrate that Latin is a 'live' language, and finally that we take aggressive steps to provide for all children who will take it a sufficient number of teachers adequately trained to open up to them the power and joy that come from a sure command of language.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>This paper is part of an address delivered before The Classical Association of The Atlantic States at their Fall Meeting in New York, November 24, 1945.

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## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Listed below are a number of publications that will interest Classical scholars. These works appeared in France during the years from 1939 to 1945. These bibliographical notices were in nearly all instances prepared from examination of the books themselves on September 10-12, 1945. An increase in the prices of earlier books was authorized in April 1945; prices in francs herein shown marked with the asterisk have been verified as *current*. Of course, the usual statement applies here, that prices must be regarded as not confirmed. Pagination marked <sup>1</sup> indicates that facing pages of text and translation have duplicate numbers.

To make the picture of French wartime scholarship more nearly complete, several works 'in press' are included.

This bibliography was contributed by PROFESSOR JOTHAM JOHNSON.

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**Anthologia Graeca.** Anthologie grecque. Première partie. Anthologie Palatine, tome VI (livre VIII, Épigrammes de Saint Grégoire le Théologien et Grégoire de Nazianze). 123 pages.<sup>1</sup> Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," Paris 1944 120 fr.\*

**Apuleius.** Apulée, les Métamorphoses, tome I (livres I-III). Texte établi par D. S. ROBERTSON et traduit par PAUL VALLETTE. Ixiv, 87 pages.<sup>1</sup> Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," Paris 1940 60 fr.\*

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**Epictetus.** Épictète, Entretiens, livre I. Texte établi et traduit par JOSEPH SOULHÉ. lxxxvi, 117 pages.<sup>1</sup> Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," Paris 1940 80 fr.\*

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**Prudentius.** Prudence, tome I. Cathemerinon Liber (Livre d'Heures). Texte établi et traduit par M. LAVARENNE. xxxix, 77 pages.<sup>1</sup> Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," Paris 1943. 45 fr.\*

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**Seneca.** Sénèque, Lettres à Lucilius, tome I (livres I-IV). Texte établi par FRANÇOIS PRÉCHAC et traduit par HENRI NOBLOT. xxi, 170 pages.<sup>1</sup> Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," Paris 1945 60 fr.\*

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